

Five-story student housing project planned west of BSU

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Boise State students could get new off-campus digs, though the proposed five-story Boise Heights project needs approval from city planners. Rendering courtesy of ZGA Architects & Planners.

A California developer wants to build a new five-story, 130-unit apartment complex near Boise State University that would serve as student housing. The proposed Boise Heights project would be located next to another planned student housing project on Royal Boulevard that's delayed due to a lawsuit over the building's height.

[Boise Heights](#) would have a first-level parking garage and office space as well as four stories with 44,586 square feet of apartment space, as well as shared space with a fitness center and barbecue and fire pit. The building could house 336 students, primarily in two-bedroom and four-bedroom units.

Developer [Topanga Investments](#), which already owns the land for the project, filed a conditional-use permit with the city of Boise on June 26 for a height exemption for the project. Zoning allows for buildings at the site to be 35 feet tall, while the Heights would stretch to 64 feet. Topanga is also seeking a variance for two visitor parking spaces.

The push for denser housing near Boise State comes as the university is seeing higher enrollment, but limited university-backed housing construction. The university built townhomes along Lincoln Avenue in 2012 for 360 students and no more projects are planned. The university doesn't have enough housing for all students.

"Generally speaking, the university is supportive of the private student housing delivery model," said Jared Everett, interim associate vice president of campus planning and facilities at Boise State. He said the university has no opinion on the Boise Heights project specifically. He said the university works to make sure that off-campus housing is safe and doesn't create transportation or parking problems.

Height and parking concerns are [slowing down a proposed neighboring student housing project](#). The River Edge Apartments received a height exception from the Boise Planning and Zoning Commission in March 12. Shortly thereafter, 917 Lusk, which owns the nearby building occupied by tech company Keynetics, sued the city of Boise and the developer of that project, Royal Boulevard Associates. 917 Lusk claimed the River Edge project lacked enough parking for students and would increase parking congestion west of BSU, which would affect Keynetics.

917 Lusk lost a decision in Ada County District Court on May 31. District Judge Kathryn Sticklin ruled the city followed the law in considering the River Edge project.

"It is clear from the record that both P&Z and the Council considered the parking issue," Sticklin wrote, adding that the city acted within its authority. "Although some questioned the adequacy of the code itself, it is not within this court's purview in this case to tell the city what the codes should contain."

Eileen Barber, a co-founder and board member of Keynetics, told the *Idaho Business Review* in 2012 that if 917 Lusk lost its case, it would appeal to the Idaho Supreme Court. Barber and Keynetics CEO Brad Wiskirchen could not be reached for comment.

Joseph Coyle, the president of [University Student Living](#), which is part of [The Michaels Organization](#), the New Jersey company developing River Edge, said he's waiting to see if the case will be appealed and that the project is on hold until the legal issues are settled. He said as it stands, River Edge likely won't be completed until 2015, at the earliest.

River Edge is a larger project, with a proposed 622 occupants, than Boise Heights. They have comparable parking. River Edge has 280 parking spaces, plus some bicycle spaces, while Boise Heights has 251 spaces. That means 75 percent of Boise Heights residents would have a parking spot, while only 45 percent of River Edge residents would have a sure place to park.

Tom Zabala with ZGA Architects and Planners, the firm that designed Boise Heights, said he's met with Barber about Boise Heights, but isn't sure if 917 Lusk will be okay with the new student housing project.

"We have tried to address as many concerns as we can in this project," Zabala said.

Topanga has developed similar student housing projects near other universities, including the University of Oregon and Fresno State University.

The Boise City Design Review Committee will review the Boise Heights' request on Aug. 14. Zabala said that the project could have building permits in to the city by next February, with construction starting in March 2013 and completion in June 2015. In addition to ZGA, the project also has a general contractor, Engineered Structures Inc. of Meridian, as well as landscape architecture firm Jensen Belts Associates, structural engineer KPFF, mechanical engineer Fulcher Engineering and electrical engineer Eidam and Associates on board for the project. All the engineering firms are based in Boise.

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